

*Annual Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the
Rural District of Leeds (Roundhay and Seacroft) for
the year 1908.*

The deaths registered in the district during the year 1908-9 amount altogether to 110; fourteen in Seacroft, eighteen in Roundhay, and seventy-eight at the Manston Fever Hospital. There have been notified to me, in addition, two of residents of Seacroft, one of a resident of Roundhay, as occurring outside the district in public institutions. None of the Fever Hospital patients belonged to our district; of the other 32 registered deaths, four were deaths—by suicide or accident—of non-residents, one occurring in Seacroft, three in Roundhay Park. Thus, altogether, the deaths which really concern us are thirty-one, inclusive of the three notified from outside.

I reckon the population of Roundhay at the middle of 1908 to have been equal to about 2,570. This is less than the rate of increase which has been usual of late, for fewer new houses have been occupied than has been the rule in recent years. For Seacroft I calculate 1,185 inhabitants, and the permanent staff of the Fever Hospitals, nurses, attendants, and servants with their families—from data—I put at 150 more; the total being 3,905. In stating the gross death-rate, I also include what my data lead me to suppose to have been the floating population of the hospitals in June, exactly as would be the case when a general census was being taken, but that part of the population I ignore altogether for other purposes. Such gross death-rate will work out at 26·7 per thousand lives, nearly. The actual death-rate, including the deaths outside the district and excluding the foreign suicides, is remarkably low, *viz.*, 7·9 per thousand; that is for Roundhay, 7·4 per thousand; for Seacroft, nearly 11·2.

The births number 70: 38 for Roundhay, 32 for Seacroft. The total birth-rate is thus 17·9 per thousand inhabitants: for Roundhay, 15 nearly; for Seacroft, about 24. Of deaths under one year of age I am glad to be able to record only one, a child of six months of age; the infantile death-rate for the whole district is thus almost 14·2 per thousand born: for Roundhay, nil; for Seacroft, 31·2, nearly. It is significant that this gratifying record takes place in a year when there have not been registered any illegitimate births, for in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the offspring of such issues, in this district, are brought up by hand; and that, as usual, the advantage is with the more educated class. There has been, further, no marked prevalence of any dangerous epidemic disease.

From zymotic diseases there have been two deaths, the diseases being measles and influenza, which makes the zymotic death-rate 5·1 per thousand. There have been three deaths from tubercular disease—two pulmonary, one meningeal; the tubercular death-rate is thus 7·6 per thousand: for Seacroft, 1·5, nearly; for Roundhay, 3·9. Or reckoning pulmonary phthisis alone, the figures are respectively 5, 7·5, and 3·9. Of cancer deaths there have been almost exactly the same proportion, although not the same number, as last year, *viz.*, one-eighth nearly of the whole number of deaths, giving a mortality rate of very nearly 1·03 per mille, nearly 7·5 for Seacroft; 1·13 for Roundhay. As one has noticed frequently, though it would be hazardous to say it is a law, the people so dying have in this year, as in several recent years, none of them been of the quite poor class, nor has any one of the deaths occurred in a house where there has been, to my knowledge, a previous case. The youngest of the victims was 21 years of age; there was another at 40.

1185
150
1335

This death-rate is the lowest of which I have record ; the decadal average, which alone can make the statistics of so small a population valuable, is distinctly lowered, and its progress in this direction the last five years has been gratifying. The average number of deaths from tubercular diseases of all organs has been in the last ten years 2·8 : the average rate for the decade has been ·84, and for the last five years, ·57. Therefore, on the whole, there is decided ground for the hope that tuberculosis is on the decrease here as elsewhere in England. With a disease, the incidence of which is probably lessening, and so small a population, I do not see any benefit to be derived from compulsory notification of cases of phthisis. Everyone who comes much in contact with the poorer classes must recognize how completely their feeling has changed towards this class of disease. On the one hand they have—perhaps by means of the sanatorium, and I cannot but pay tribute to its value in this respect—lost their dread of cold fresh air which some twenty years back was so marked ; on the other hand, they are exceedingly apprehensive of infection. I have indeed known cases where a consumptive patient has found a difficulty in getting attendance because of this fear of contagion. So much so that I think the difficulty, if this tendency grows, will be to make people realise that the danger of direct infection is easily to be avoided rather than to teach them that such a danger exists. And it might easily be that the official recognition of the presence of a case of consumption in a household might lead to considerable hardship without adequate compensating advantage to the public health. That I am not exaggerating this danger is, I think, sufficiently proved by the fact that I know at least one Insurance Company in whose schedule of questions to be put to an intending insurer is this, “Is there anyone in the house in which you live suffering from consumption ?”

There have been a rather unusually large number of cases (happily without a death) of diphtheria notified this year ; all except three sporadic, and no clue to the origin except in this group of cases. The known fact that a person may carry about with him the virus, and yet give no sign of impaired health, is doubtless responsible for a number of these unexplained cases ; diphtheria may arise in such a person, or may be by him communicated to another, when, from some otherwise trifling cause, the bodily resistance is lowered. Whether from some change in the organism itself, or whether increasing recourse to the bacteriological test has only now revealed what may have been always the case, *viz.*, that the classical description of the features of the disease has not really any essential basis of fact, it is certain that nowadays one sees cases in which ten years ago the suggestion of diphtheria would have been unhesitatingly dismissed, which nevertheless are undoubtedly diphtheritic and breed cases, by infection, of a quite severely classical type. It is therefore essential in cases where doubt can exist at all, that the bacteriological test should be used ; and in the West Riding the facilities afforded by the County Council Laboratory are to be most gratefully acknowledged.

Though only three of these cases were quite certainly connected by direct infection, a fourth case occurred nearly five months after in one of the two houses affected primarily. These two houses stand in that group which goes by the name of “The Orchards,” in the Crossgates part of Seacroft. Seeing that from this quarter there has been for several years past a relatively frequent number of notifications of erysipelas—a disease which is notoriously dependant on accumulations of decaying organic matter—it is almost inevitable that a common cause should be suspected for all ; because there is good ground for supposing that insanitary accumulations of the kind afford a favouring soil for the diphtheric germ, though it cannot, of course, arise therefrom *de novo*. Rigorous scavenging and the setting in order of all the privy middens has improved matters, and to-day the surroundings are better than I have known them. But to ensure the continuance of this improvement, very frequent scavenging will be necessary ; and it appears to me that in the long run it might be as cheap, and certainly would be safer, for the Council to substitute a trough water-closet for the common privy which stands in the centre of these score or more of dwellings, and which has been the cause of bitter complaint from the residents. Along the centre road—the only means of access to some of the houses—the sewer runs, and there has been equal complaint about the smell arising from a manhole grating there.

The unreasonableness of these open gratings is a point I have, I fear, laboured before. But recent investigations have shown a danger to be feared from them, which makes it much to the point that I should remark on it again. The instinct of the lay mind has always scented peril in the "bad smell." The professional mind has, perhaps, been somewhat contemptuous of this instinct; knowing that no specific disease can arise except from specific cause, it has concluded that because hitherto it had failed to find specific micro-organisms in sewer gas, that they were not there at all. But there is no doubt now that they may be found therein, and there is corresponding justification for the dread of inhaling sewer gas which the average person feels. And if it is an outrage on health to allow a drain to reek into a house, it is surely common-sense that a sewer should not be allowed to reek into a place of common resort, as, *e.g.*, a high-road. The principle is precisely the same; any difference is of degree not of kind, as is conclusively shown by the fact that all are agreed that the gullies by the side of the footpaths should be trapped. If it be no nuisance to leave exit for the stench in the centre, and if free access of air is the thing to be sought, then these gullies should be left unsealed, for thus the access of air would be freer still, and the stench attenuated by wider distribution. I do not, personally, believe in the forcing of traps by sewer gas in a thoroughly sound drain; if there were grounds for such fear, however, it could be readily met by ventilating shafts at intervals; and I do not see any necessity for a single open grating in a place where it is likely to give offence throughout the range of sewers in our district. The loss of oxidation which the sewage would incur by closure of such openings, in a rapid transit to the filter bed on the Leeds system, would be very trifling; indeed, the opposing—the conventional—theory seems to me to be founded on a tacit assumption that there must be stagnation, *i.e.*, time for large volumes of gas must be given *in transitu*; and the stopping of many of these holes would, I am sure, be gratefully appreciated by many residents, and I know quite positively by one person who has often to bear the brunt of the complaints.

After several years' interval, a case of tuberculosis of the udder has been found in a dairy farm in the district and reported to me from Leeds. It was a newly bought cow, which had calved a few days after the purchase; it was, of course, promptly isolated. I have nothing new to say about the dairy farms in the district this year; all are passable, some are extremely good, and I firmly believe that greater attention is being paid to the personal cleanliness of the milkers than there used to be. It is far more common to see them put on a washable and clean coat than it used to be. Grooming of the cows, however, one hardly, if ever sees. The difficulty, as with so many other problems of the public health, is chiefly economical. It could hardly be made to pay, or at any rate cannot until consumers realise how frequently milk may be and is contaminated with cows' manure, which centuries of ignorance have led farming persons to believe to be, if not wholesome, at any rate innocuous; but which is known sometimes to contain, among other germs more or less dangerous, the germ of tubercle from intestinal lesions.

When I suggested it a couple of years ago, I was assured on enquiry that such a project would be sure to fail on account of the trades union feeling among milk dealers; but I still think that a public offer of a prize for clean cows and milkers would be useful. If no one entered for the competition, the very advertisement in the public press would be an education to consumers; and when you have educated the ordinary layman to be his own sanitary inspector—the tendency is at present far too much the other way—you have done more to solve the problem of health than any amount of multiplication of officials can possibly do. If, on the other hand, several entered for the competition, practically all the rest would have to do so too, and a distinct raising of the standard would necessarily follow. Of course, all would depend on the amount of publicity given.

Nor have I anything to add on to the question of the housing of the poor. There have not been any new houses added for working-class tenants, though they would be eagerly taken if any such were to be built, especially in Seacroft. There are numbers of old houses which would be the better for being pulled down to make room for newer and more commodious ones; but as they are they serve, by their cheapness, a real need, and without

the substitution of equally cheap houses of a better kind, it may well be that any drastic procedure would do more harm than good. There are still a few houses without any accommodation for slops within doors, and a number with insufficient bedroom accommodation. But I am strongly of opinion that any effort which leads to the increasing of the rates or of taxation will only ultimately aggravate the evil, and that the only sure (if very slow) method of producing permanent amelioration is the reduction of public burdens and the deliberate raising, by education, of the standard of living of the working classes. One very great improvement might, however, be easily and without much expense made, *viz.*, of the paving round and towards the houses, especially in Seacroft. In rainy weather or after a thaw, in many cases you can only get to them through a regular slough of mud.

There is no change in the number of slaughter-houses, *viz.*, four, all in Seacroft. They are well kept and clean. Often as I have examined the shops, I have never seen meat except of good quality exposed for sale.

The factories and workshops are the same as last year, except that one, the underground bakeshop at Roundhay which you had licensed, has been discontinued. There is really only one important workplace of the kind, *viz.*, the millinery and dressmaking workshop kept by A. Wilkinson, at Roundhay. There are here a variable number of female assistants, the maximum having been, this year, nine; there are two ample workrooms on the second and third floors, which are both now in constant use. The workers have tea in a third room, but other meals are taken off the premises. Ventilation and light are ample; a sanitary convenience is on the ground floor and in good condition. Another dressmaker's establishment, at Seacroft, is kept by two sisters, who reserve the whole of a two-roomed cottage for the work. They employ three and sometimes four assistants, from 17 years of age upwards. There is no occasion for any comment. Another dressmaker at Roundhay employs one assistant, and uses a wooden shed built behind the house for a workshop. The ventilation is good enough, as also the warmth in winter time; the light is not all that could be desired. The single bakeshop, which is also at Roundhay, is part of the house and shop but cut off from both by a cross passage opening into a side street. One baker does all the work now. The bakeshop is reasonably clean; there is no cause for comment, if the ashpit adjoining the shop is reserved for cinders and non-putrefiable matter, as I am solemnly assured that it is; nor indeed have I ever seen any offensive matter there. The "factories" are two in number, both in Seacroft, which have earned the dignity of that name by reason of, in the one case a steam-, in the other a gas-engine being used to drive a hay chopper, and a vertical saw or lathe respectively. The latter is wholly domestic, being conducted by father and sons; in the former case the boiler, which is fenced in, is superintended on the rare occasions of its use, by a hired man; the chopper being looked after by the owner, and that being fenced in. There is no occasion for remark here, or on the remaining workshop—a joiner's and undertaker's—run by father and son.

B. G. M. BASKETT, M.B., Oxon.